Alfred N. Whitehead's "a Here and a Now" and its Application to Administration Theory

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From 1920s to 1930s, the Scientific Community was initiated and the new movement of Administration Theory was begun in Harvard Business School. The movement was to construct Science of Human Cooperation. Alfred N. Whitehead's Lowell Lecture "Science and the Modern World," especially his "a here and a now" profoundly influenced the movement.

In my study, I clarify A. N. Whitehead's influence on L. J. Henderson, a Physiologist who recruited Alfred, W. B. Donham, The second Dean of Harvard Business School, E. Mayo, the founder of Human Relations, C. I. Barnard, the founder of Modern Administration Theory, and T. North Whitehead, Alfred's son. My focal point is to construct the conceptual scheme based on Alfred's philosophy, especially "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" and "a here and a now" in Administration Theory.

1. Introduction: The purpose of my paper

From 1920s to 1930s, epoch-making thinkers in Administration Theory appeared on the Stage of the Graduate School of Business Administration, George F. Baker Foundation (Harvard Business School). They formed the scientific community and constructed Science of Human Cooperation; namely, Human Relations and Barnard Theory.

The man who performed an important role in constructing Science of Human Cooperation, was Alfred N. Whitehead (1861-1947). His Lowell Lecture "Science and the Modern World" (1925) profoundly influenced these epoch-making thinkers.[1)]

In my paper, I will clarify Alfred Whitehead's influence on these thinkers concerning Administration Theory; namely, L. J. Henderson, a physiologist who recruited Alfred Whitehead, W. B. Donham, the second Dean of Harvard Business School, E. Mayo, the founder of Human Relations, C. I. Barnard, the founder of Modern Administration Theory, and T. North Whitehead, Alfred's son.

My focal point is to clarify their construction of conceptual schemes based on Alfred's philosophy, especially "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" and "a here and a now" in Administration Theory.

At the beginning of my paper, I will explain critical minds of epoch-making thinkers based upon correspondences among them in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School.

2. Initiation of the Scientific Community at Harvard Business School

On the stage of Harvard Business School from 1920s to 1930s, the Scientific Community was initiated and Sciences of Human Cooperation; namely, Human Relations and Barnard Theory were constructed by epoch-making thinkers. Principal thinkers were W. B. Donham, L. J. Henderson, E. Mayo, and C. I. Barnard.

1) Wallace B. Donham (1877-1954), as

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second Dean of Harvard Business School (1919 - 1942), laid the foundation of the Harvard Business School's prosperity. Just after taking the Dean's post, he interposed an objection to the resolution stated as a result of the faculty meeting of the "Business School of Applied Economics," because Applied Economics could not explain his experience prior to becoming the dean of dealing with concrete human problems in industry. As he realized the difference between "knowing" and "teaching", he gave up "teaching", and sought for a new science different from Applied Economics.[2] The person, who consented and offered an affirmative answer, was L. J. Henderson.

2) Lawrence J. Henderson (1878-1942), a prominent physiologist, was a great friend of Donham and had a profound knowledge of philosophy. It was well known that he contributed immense efforts to invite Alfred N. Whitehead as a professor of Philosophy at Harvard University.

In 1926, answering Donham's expectation, Henderson worked out the conception of "Human Biology" as the pure science that underlies the Graduate School of Business Administration. Human Biology is concerned with the human as a whole rather than parts of the human and the need for an interdisciplinary approach, that is, physiology, mental hygiene, and psychology.[3]

So, E. Mayo, a psychologist, participated in their conception.

3) Elton Mayo (1880-1949), the founder of Human Relations in Administration Theory, had been investigating "psychology of total situation." Because he believed that as the productive efficiency of an industrial worker is the expression of the total mental situation of the human, Mayo had to understand the "total situation", namely, personal history and whole attitude of life related to the industrial worker.

Emphasizing the scientific approach to human problems in industry and society, Mayo searched for research results of physiology and mental medicine and was appointed as associate professor of industrial research at Harvard Business School in 1926.[4]

In this way, the "triumvirate" by Donham, Henderson and Mayo, began to construct a new science. The critical minds of the "triumvirate" was a critique of traditional social sciences which had not been able to explain the social world they captured by their experiences. The scientific studies at that time had been specialized and as a result science could not capture total human problems and sentiments in industry. Consequently, they had to inquire about the science themselves.

4) Chester I. Barnard (1886-1961) was not a researcher, but a businessman. Nevertheless, he is the founder of Modern Administration Theory and his Lowell Lecture "The Functions of the Executive" (1937) at Harvard University has been and is even now a first-class writing related to Administration Theory.[5]

Beginning intellectual interchange with staffs of Harvard Business School through Phillip Cabot in 1934, Barnard also possessed a critical mind similar to the "triumvirate." Through his experiences and observations as the President of New Jersey Bell Telephone Company and contributions to various public services, Barnard had been intuitively familiar with "uniformities" of human cooperation and struggled with investigating science of organizations as a general theory, which was the "most important things forgotten in social sciences."[6]

3. Alfred N. Whitehead Coming on Harvard Business School

The man who gave philosophical foundation to the direction of Harvard Business School aimed at the construction of Science of Human Cooperation, was Alfred N. Whitehead.

Alfred became a professor of philosophy at Harvard University in 1924 and gave Lowell Lecture "Science and the Modern World" the next year. Donham, Henderson, and Mayo followed these lectures. Donham admired Alfred's thought and requested Alfred to present a lecture for the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the School. Henderson reviewed *Science and the Modern World* and Mayo was resonant with the idea concerning an organism as constituent unit of science and philosophy. Barnard had already been versed in Alfred's writings and it has been stated that Barnard's literary style was similar to Alfred's style.[7)]

What Alfred pointed out as scientific problems is "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness."[8)] He says that "it (modern science) fixes attention on a definite group of abstractions, neglects everything else, and elicits every scrap of information and theory which is relevant to what it has retained. This method is triumphant, provided that the abstractions are judicious. But, however triumphant, the triumph is within limits. The neglect of these limits leads to disastrous oversights."

As "only one example of general danger inherent in modern science," Alfred criticizes that the first period after the death of Adam Smith (1790) did more harm than good. "It riveted on men a certain set of abstractions which were disastrous in their influence on modern mentality. It dehumanized industry."[9)]

Donham, Henderson, Mayo, and Barnard, all shared Alfred's critique, and in their papers and correspondence, they frequently quoted Alfred's phrase "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness." Alfred provided the base of their criticism of modern science and the foundation was philosophy. Because philosophy had been foisted onto the task of accepting the scientific abstractions as the most concrete rendering of fact and "philosophy is the critic of abstractions."[10)]

Criticizing dualists who accept matter and mind, Alfred developed organicism. Characteristics of organicism are that, every concrete reality itself is one wholeness, not constant and unchangeable, grasped in the process as a new event always gathering things, and bears emergence in the process. Critical differences of the view of organic cosmos from the view of mechanical cosmos are "wholeness," "process" and "emergence."

From this point of view, Whitehead excluded the thinking mode of "substance attribute," the nature of "Simple Location," and "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness." The question is to what extent the newly constructed science at Harvard Business School, that is to say, Science of Human Cooperation, is reflected by philosophy of organism.

4. The Relevance of "a here and a now" and Concepts Grounded on Organicism

1) Henderson's Procedure in a Science : "Method of Hippocrates"

Henderson had denied the possibility concerning the formation of social sciences. But he met with V. Pareto's sociology and was convinced of the formation of social sciences.

And he established the procedure in a science, "method of Hippocrates," that is, the physician must have, first, "intimate, habitual,

intuitive familiarity with things; secondly, systematic knowledge of things; and thirdly, an effective way of thinking about things."[11] His intuitive familiarity must embrace his systematic knowledge and his way of thinking as well as the things he studies. The most important element of these he emphasized is the first element.

Henderson believed science as the behavior of men called scientists. As the behavior process, the first element is interpreted as hard, persistent, intelligent, responsible, unremitting labor in the sick room not in the library; the all-round adaptation of the doctor to his task, an adaptation that is far from being merely intellectual.

"An effective way of thinking about things," namely, conceptual scheme is drawn out by "intuitive familiarity" based on the world of experiences. Using the conceptual scheme, we can grasp facts in the world of experiences. Furthermore, the view of cosmos or world is formed by the intuitive familiarity with things. Therefore, conceptual scheme should reflect the specific view of the cosmos brought up through process of science.

I believe that the procedure of scientific method avoiding "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" is the intuitive familiarity with things. So, it is inquired that how scientists reflect the view of cosmos grasped through their experience upon the conceptual scheme. This inquiry is issues of depth of experience and wisdom of scientists. Therefore, we have to deal with the problem of reflection of organic cosmos upon conceptual schemes of Human Relations and Barnard Theory.

2) Concept of Human : "a here and a now"

Human Relations presents the "Social Man" as the human view. The man who first presented the "Social Man" is Thomas North Whitehead (1891-1969). North was the son of Alfred N. Whitehead and became an Assistant Professor of Business at Harvard Business School in 1931. North is the forgotten man in the History of Administration Theory.

The "Social Man" is ordinarily understood as the person motivated by social motives at "simple location." But North asserts that "satisfactions of persons are social phenomenon," because this "social" means "interhuman activity" and his satisfaction has to be understood within the context of phenomena of interhuman activity.[12]

This means that the person, on the one hand, who is simple location based on the view of mechanic cosmos, is an isolated being as the Economic Man, and on the other hand, the person is "the unity of a prehension" based on the view of organic cosmos. Alfred says that "This unity of a prehension defines itself as *a here and a now*, and the things so gathered into the grasped unity have essential reference to other places and other times."[13]

His son, North also says that "Work is finally performed because *here and now* the situation satisfies the need for self-expression; because it provides an acceptable way of life."[14]

North's father, Alfred emphasized the phrase "a here and a now" in *Science and the Modern World*. The phrase, "a here and a now" means issues of time and space. Alfred presented the concept "event" to clarify the issues. Concerning time, each past, present and future is not separable from another, but the past fuses into "a now" and the future throws back on to "a now." Concerning space, "a here" is not simple location, but means that in the event parts intertwine with one another and the event as part intertwines with the whole. The phrase "a here and a now"

means every event is process and dynamic.

Furthermore, the man who most clearly defined a human view based on organicism is Chester I. Barnard. His human view is a dual treatment; namely, "the status of individuals" and "the properties of persons."[15] By defining the individual as "a single, unique, independent, isolated, whole thing, embodying innumerable forces and materials past and present which are, biological, and social factors," human organism means "wholeness" in a here and a now. By defining properties of individuals as "activities, psychological factors, the limited power of choice, and purpose," human organism means "emergence" in a here and a now. Thus Barnard captures the human in the process. These "process," "wholeness" and "emergence" are the characteristics of organism Alfred proposed.

North and Barnard embodied organicism into the concept of human.

3) Concept of Organization : Activities as Components of Organization

The primary concept I focus on is the concept of organization. Because the concept of organization is basic to Administration Theory. The construction of organization theory, Human Relations and Barnard Theory marked the epoch in Administration Theory. How did they devise the concept to avoid "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?"

In the first place, systems theory was adopted by L. J. Henderson.[16] It means that organization as human interactions is "wholeness." Understanding the human interactions, namely, organization as system is to give attention to interdependence of elements in the system, and organization means wholeness beyond the sum of parts.

Next, concerning other characteristics of organism, "process" and "emergency," how did they generalize organization? The man who first included "process" and "emergence" in the concept of organizations, was also North. Having made great account of "here and now," he fixed his eyes upon interhuman activity and made these activities as components of organization.[17]

Alfred says that "the organic starting point is from the analysis of process as the realization of events disposed in an interlocked community," and "the analysis of reality indicates the two factors, activity emerging into individualised aesthetic value. Also the emergent value is the measure of the individualisation of activity."[18]

Concerning "emergence" as the characteristic of the organism, value is emerged by activity. Therefore, the key to analyzing organizations is activity. North defined interhuman activity as components of organization and included "process" and "emergence" within the concept of organization.

Especially, Barnard positively generalized organization on the basis of organicism. Organizations constituted by activities of persons, corresponds to the pattern of aspects of other events which it grasps into its own unity, and the pattern of its aspects which other events severally grasp into their unities.[19] To generalize these processes, Barnard brought the concept of cooperative system into his organization theory. Elements of a cooperative system are biological, physical, and social factors.[20]

The concept of cooperative system has the aim of avoiding thinking about organization in the abstract which has the possibility of "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness." To avoid the possibility, Barnard not only constituted organizations of activities of persons, but also brought the concept of cooperative system. An organization forms "the one" including

biological, physical, and social factors and "the one" forms "much."

Thus, T. North Whitehead and C. I. Barnard devised the concepts to avoid "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness," and constructed concepts based upon philosophy of organism.

5. Towards the Union of Theory and Practice, and Role of Philosophy

In my paper, I have treated epochmaking thinkers in Administration Theory from 1920s to 1930s. As epoch-making, they constructed Science of Human Cooperation. This fact has already been known in the History of Administration Theory. My assertion is that Science of Human Cooperation was grounded on philosophy of organism and its concepts were devised to avoid "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness."

Administration Theory is destined to directly solve the present problems in the world of experience. Therefore, Administration theory has to embody the nature of practice. On the other hand, Administration Theory, as applied science, wishes for the nature of science.

But scientific thinking by using abstract ideas is frequently subjected to "the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness." Being conscious of this possibility of the Fallacy, Donham, Henderson, Mayo, Barnard and North Whitehead criticized economics and searched for the union of theory and practice. To search for the union, they tried to construct Administration Theory on the basis of philosophy, not from abstract to concreteness, but from concreteness to abstract. Thus Human Relations and Barnard Theory were formed in 1930s.

In searching for the union of theory and practice, we, grounded on organistic philosophy, thoroughly examine the conceptual scheme, similar to T. North Whitehead and C. I. Barnard.

Let me add a few more words in conclusion. We, as scientists, should warn ourselves of Alfred's words; that is to say, "philosophy is the critic of abstractions." "Its function is the double one, first of harmonising them by assigning to them their right relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuition of the universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more complete schemes of thought".[21)]

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Notes

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1) Alfred N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures, 1925*, New York, The Free Press, 1926.

2) Letter from W. B. Donham to Lawrence J. Henderson, Dec. 27, 1937, Henderson Collection, Folder 4-9, and W. B. Donham, "Confidential," March 31, 1937, Donham Collection GB2.332, Box2, in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School. *Cf.*, John C. Baker, "Perspective on Wallace Brett Donham," *Harvard Business School Bulletin,* November/December, 1978, p.11.

3) Letter from L. J. Henderson to Alfred N. Whitehead, Feb. 6, 1924, UAI 5.160 1922-25, Box 563 in Pusey Library, Harvard University. L. J. Henderson, "The Thermodynamics-Human Biology (Folder Title)," Henderson Collection, Folder 19-18, in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School, and "Business Education as Envisaged by the Scientist," *Harvard Business Review,* Vol.V No.4, July 1927.

4) Letter from G. E. Mayo to David L. Edsall, Sep. 1, 1919, in The Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine, Harvard Medical School. G. E. Mayo, "the Basis of Industrial Psychology : The Psychology of the Total Situation

Is Basic to a Psychology of Management," *Bulletin of The Taylor Society,* Vol.IX No.6, Dec. 1924. Letter from W. B. Donham to A. Lawrence Lowell, March 26, 1926, and letter from A. L. Lowell to W. B. Donham, March 30, 1926, Donham Collection, Folder 38-8, in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School.

5) Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1938.

6) Letter from Phillip Cabot to C. I. Barnard, Nov. 30, 1934, and letter from C. I. Barnard to P. Cabot, Dec. 3, 1934, Cabot Collection Case 3, in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School. C. I. Barnard, "Corporate Management and Morals," *Conference on a Scientific Study of Industrial Labor Conditions, Nov. 13, 1937,* Transcription of Discussion, National Research Council, p. 94.

7) L. J. Henderson, "A Philosophical Interpretation of Nature Being a Review of Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures, 1925, by Alfred North Whitehead," *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, Vol.1 No.2, April 1926. Letter from G. E. Mayo to E. R. Embree (the Rockefeller Foundation), Oct. 21, 1926, LSRM Box53 Folder 572 in Rockefeller Foundation Archives. Letter from P. Cabot to C. I. Barnard, Nov. 30, 1934, Cabot Collection Case 3, in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School.

8) A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures, 1925, op. cit*., p.51.

9) *Ibid*., p. 200.

10) *Ibid*., p. 87.

11) L. J. Henderson, "Address before Asso. Harvard Clubs, Indianapolis, May 15, 1937," Henderson Collection Folder 19-21, in Baker Library Archives, Harvard Business School. pp. 1-2.

12) T. North Whitehead, "Human Relation within Industrial Groups," *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, autumn, 1935. pp. 1-2.

13) A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures, 1925, op. cit.,* p. 69.

14) T. N. Whitehead, "The Scientific Study of the Industrial Worker," *Harvard Business Review,* July, 1934. p. 471.

15) C. I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive,* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1938. pp. 8-15.

16) L. J. Henderson, *Pareto's General Sociology: A Physiologist's Interpretation,* Harvard Univerity Press, 1935.

17) T. N. Whitehead, "Human Relations within Industrial Groups," *op. cit*., p. 6.

18) A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures, 1925, op. cit.*, p. 199.

19) *Ibid*., p. 103.

20) C. I. Barnard, "Corporate Management and Morals," *op. cit.*, pp. 93-95.

21) A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World, Lowell Lectures, 1925, op. cit.,* p.87.